

McGregor Range, New Mexico Land Withdrawal Renewal Legislative Environmental Impact Statement



Multiple Use Management



For nearly 50 years, McGregor Range has served as an anti-aircraft artillery and missile range for the U.S. Army. In addition to supporting the military mission, certain areas of the range have also been used for nonmilitary purposes such as grazing, recreation, and preservation.

Multiple Use Objective

Taken broadly, the objective of multiple use is to manage surface and subsurface resources so they are used in a combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.

The Army is the priority user and overall administrator of McGregor Range and is responsible for scheduling military use and controlling public access. However, much of the range is open for designated nonmilitary activities on a co-use basis, such as grazing on more than 271,000 acres of withdrawn and Army fee-owned land.

Working in Partnership

Since 1966, the Army and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have co-managed portions of McGregor Range, which is located in Otero County in south-central New Mexico. The Army and the BLM operate together through a *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*, which ensures that the lands, natural resources, and nonmilitary uses of the range are managed in an environmentally responsible way.

The BLM, in conjunction with the Army and the public, developed the *McGregor Range Resource*

Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) to provide a comprehensive framework for managing the range's withdrawn public land and allocating resources using the principles of multiple use. The plan's objectives include placing a priority on making withdrawn public land and resources available for compatible use and development, subject to meeting military training and testing requirements.

Balancing Military Use with Public Use

Nonmilitary activities occur on designated lands within the range. Public uses include livestock grazing, hunting, and recreation. The primary nonmilitary use of the McGregor Range is grazing. As described in the MOU, the BLM manages the grazing program and authorizes livestock grazing units, which are put up for public auction to the highest bidder. The 14 grazing units (about 271,000 acres) within the range currently support about 2,900 cattle annually.

Under Public Law (PL) 99-606, the lands comprising McGregor Range were withdrawn from use under the mining laws, mineral leasing, and geothermal leasing laws. Under the RMPA, McGregor Range is closed for locatable minerals such as gold, zinc, or copper. However, about 100,000 acres are open for oil, gas, and geothermal leases, and over 287,000 acres are open for saleable minerals such as sand and gravel. Any application that is submitted to BLM to extract these minerals must first be approved by the Army prior to BLM processing and granting the application.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish manages hunting activities on the range. Other

recreational uses such as hiking, picnicking, bird watching, and photography are available. Off-road vehicle use is limited to designated roads and trails.

To ensure the public's safety and avoid interference with military missions, all persons are required to obtain a permit from the Range Development and Enforcement Office to access and use range lands. Between 1,000 and 1,700 permits are issued annually. Public access through McGregor Range is available on New Mexico Highway 506. For public safety during missile firings, New Mexico Highway 506 was closed for brief periods on 57 days in 1996. Currently, the highway is usually closed for portions of 2 or 3 days during missile firings from September through November, and for portions of each day during a 2-week period following the Roving Sands Joint Training Exercise.

The McGregor Black Grama Grassland Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is comprised of four separate stands of black grama grasses located along the Otero Mesa escarpment and New Mexico Highway 506. ACECs are areas where special management attention is needed to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important cultural or natural resources, or to protect human life from natural hazards. These areas are fenced to prevent cattle from grazing in the ACEC. Members of the public are allowed access to the ACEC under the same restrictions and regulations as other publicly accessible parts of McGregor Range. Military training is not allowed in the ACEC. The ACEC is maintained and managed jointly

through cooperative agreements between the U.S. Army, BLM, and New Mexico State University.

The BLM is responsible for managing cultural resources throughout the range for which the BLM or third parties are the proponents of an action. The public has access to a wide range of cultural resources throughout the co-use portions of McGregor Range. Low levels of public use on the range have provided a beneficial level of protection to potentially sensitive resources.

Public Land Withdrawals

Public lands are federal lands managed under the *Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)*. When public lands are withdrawn from the public domain and designated for a particular purpose, as with McGregor Range, they are restricted and protected from all forms of appropriation under general land laws. The Act also provides for public uses such as grazing and mining.

PL 99-606, also known as *The Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1986*, requires that all of the military land withdrawals it governs, including McGregor Range, terminate on November 6, 2001, unless renewed by an Act of Congress.

The Army applied for renewal of the McGregor Range land withdrawal during October 1998. Congress is the decision maker regarding the land withdrawal renewal and will issue its decision through legislation.

For More Information

Further information on the renewal may be obtained by calling 915-568-6708 or toll-free 1-888-248-8329, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., mountain time. At other times, leave a message and your call will be returned. The Fort Bliss public affairs staff (915-568-4505) and Fort Bliss Web site (www.bliss.army.mil) can provide additional information, or write to Fort Bliss Public Affairs Office, U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery Center and Fort Bliss, Building 15, Fort Bliss, Texas 79916.

Comments on the Draft LEIS should be received by February 9, 1999. Please direct comments to Dr. Andy Vliet, Program Manager, McGregor Range Military Land Withdrawal Renewal, U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery Center and Fort Bliss, Attn: ATZC-CSA, P.O. Box 6020, Fort Bliss, Texas 79906, or send e-mail to: mcmgregor@emh10.bliss.army.mil.
